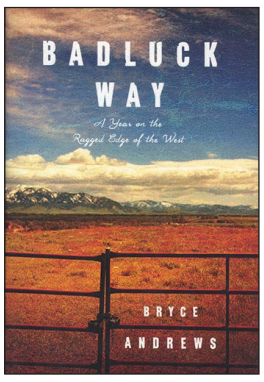
About Books

Badluck Way: ***A Year on the Ragged Edge of the West***
By Bryce Andrews
Published January 2014 by Atria Books, New York, NY
$25 hardcover



As Bryce Andrews recounts a year spent on the vast Sun Ranch, sprawling between the Madison and Gravelly mountains, his words bristle and glisten, much like the wolves that enthrall the young cowboy.

"The wolf came up Beaver Creek quiet as fog," he writes of the enigmatic, ominous predators. "Wolves inhabit a landscape humans can never know. Their forest is different from the one we walk through – more intelligible, bursting at the seams with information."

Andrews is close behind, trailing the Wedge Pack as it builds a den in Squaw Creek's "labyrinth of fens and dark timber." He tunes eyes and ears to the new landscape, exploring meadows, forests and creek beds by foot, horse and four-wheeler. Building fence, splicing wire, filling stock tanks and nursing cattle, he comes to know the ranch and its wild and domesticated inhabitants. "I was living at the center of my heart's geography. And I knew it," he writes.

Gradually, the greenhorn from Seattle hardens. The real work of ranching, he discovers, "is the process of toughening the body into something worn, weathered, scarred, and strong enough to do everything asked of it."

Andrews, the son of a Seattle photographer and an art director, got his first taste for "big, dry, lonely country" at seven years old, when the family visited sculptor Pat Zentz on his ranch near Billings. He returned summer after summer, learning enough skills to apply for the job at the Sun.

The ranch's wealthy owner is committed to running a spread where human and animal interactions were "carefully choreographed to complement, rather than hinder, the systems of the wild." And wild it is, perched near Yellowstone Park and the boundary of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, with more 2,000 elk, plus deer, antelope and a handful of grizzlies also calling it their summer home.

But it's the wolves that add grit and complexity to the story. As Andrews and his compatriots drive cattle higher into the hills, wolves begin to attack the livestock. Andrews finds himself "stuck between my love of wild things and rage at the ruin of a summer's work."

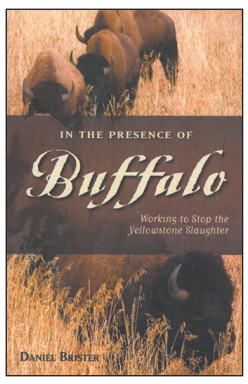
By late July, with four heifers dead, he joins the hunt, and shoots the pack leader – an event that haunts him. "I couldn't help thinking about the fact that I had taken something that floated through the forest like a spirit, and reduced it to dead weight and fecal smell."

After his year at the Sun, Andrews earned a master's degree in environmental studies at The University of Montana, and has gone on to manage and help restore several Montana ranches.

"One could find no better guide than Bryce Andrews for a journey along the shifting border between the wild and the tame; a daunting frontier filled with unsettling truths, blood and beauty," writes columnist David Horsey in the *Los Angeles Times*.

– Kristi Niemeyer

In the Presence of Buffalo: ***Working to Stop the Yellowstone Slaughter***
By Daniel Brister
Published 2013 by WestWinds Press, Portland, OR
$16.99 softcover



"Why the hell would you go to jail over buffalo?" asks a fellow inmate at the county jail in Bozeman.

For Daniel Brister, head of the Buffalo Field Campaign, the answer is both easy and complicated. The easy part is his passion for the last vestiges of wild bison in the United States, which reside in Yellowstone National Park. The complexity involves state and federal management policies that put the bison at risk when they unknowingly venture beyond the park's borders each winter into Montana.

Ranchers on lands adjacent to the park have long argued that the bison will contaminate their cattle with brucellosis, a disease that causes cows to abort. But Brister contends that's a smokescreen. "Brucellosis has been detected in many species, including elk, deer, moose, coyotes, wolves, bears, and bison," he writes.

Elk, which are 20 times more populous than bison in the park and are known to have transmitted brucellosis to livestock, roam freely across the borders. "If brucellosis is such a grave threat, why is infection among the elk so blatantly ignored?" he asks.

The answer, he believes, is economics. First, elk hunting is a major source of revenue for Montana; and secondly, if bison began to re-inhabit their ancestral range north of the park they'd be competing with cattle for grass on public lands.

The state Department of Livestock (DOL), charged with controlling bison when they wander out of the park, is the most visible adversary of Brister and his hearty group of volunteers. Since 1997, Brister's first year with the Buffalo Field Campaign, the DOL and Park Service have shot nearly 4,000 wild bison.

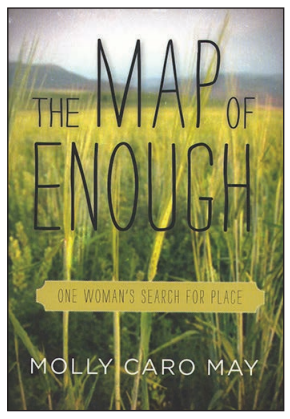
Over that same period of time, more than 4,000 volunteers from around the world have shown up to monitor migrations out of the park and interfere with DOL operations. "From them, I have learned a powerful lesson," he writes. "Apathy is not omnipotent."

Brister's book also traces the history of buffalo management in the U.S., from the near decimation of the species in the 1800s to today, and makes a compelling case for reconsidering our approach to the last unfettered bison.

The author is a firefighter and emergency medical technician who lives in western Montana.

– Kristi Niemeyer

The Map of Enough: ***One Woman's Search for Place***
By Molly Caro May
Published 2014 by Counterpoint Press, Berkeley, CA
$25 hardcover



How does a person make the decision to put down roots when for most of their life they have felt like a "tourist to everything"? Author Molly Caro May grew up in a nomadic family, moving often to various foreign countries and the U.S. As a college student and young adult, she continued to periodically uproot herself and move on, in search of – what?

This debut memoir is her answer to the question, "Could she learn to be fully present in her life without hankering to be elsewhere?"

May gives a thoughtful and poetic look at settling in and settling down when she and her fiancé, Chris, move to land outside of Bozeman where her family owns a cabin. Their plan was to build a traditional Mongolian yurt with their own hands, and live in it for at least a year.

She describes, with loving detail, the work of cutting, sanding and bending the wood to craft their new home and the deep satisfaction that comes from hard physical work. May not only wants to live on "the Land" (with a capital "L"), she wants to feel it, to be a part of it.

She aptly describes the smells, sights and sounds that delight and connect her to their chosen place. The sensation of digging her toes into the creek mud or flopping down into a field of fragrant prairie grass and wildflowers, the call of an owl at night – all beckon to her and help quell her yearning to uproot and search for something yet unknown.

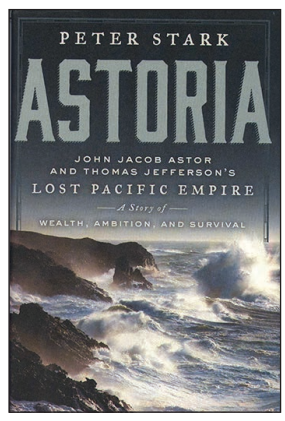
How does a person know when and where to put down roots? How do we decide what kind of life we want to lead? And when is what is in front of us enough? These are some of the life choices that the author presents herself, and readers, as she grows and changes in her newly chosen environment.

"May's poetic, gleaming prose makes palpable the wildness and wind, freezing and thawing earth, delicate fragrances of grass and budding trees – and her own profound transformation," writes *Kirkus* in a Starred Review.

May is a graduate of Middlebury College, has worked at a variety of occupations, including in the editorial department of a New York-based publisher, and has taught writing classes to teenagers. She lives in the Gallatin Valley with her family.

– Judy Shafter

Astoria: ***John Jacob Astor and Thomas Jefferson's Lost Pacific Empire: A Story of Wealth, Ambition, and Survival***
By Peter Stark
Published 2014 by Harper Collins, New York, NY
$27.99 hardcover



When Capt. Meriwether Lewis returned to Washington, D.C., in 1806 from his epic journey with the Corps of Discovery, he urged President Jefferson to establish a seaport on the Pacific coast to harvest the rich abundance of animal furs for international trade.

Jefferson agreed, but thought the venture best left to private enterprise. This opened the door for wealthy businessman John Jacob Astor, skilled in the business of fur trading and buying, to receive the enthusiastic backing of Jefferson and embark upon a plan to create "the largest commercial enterprise the world has ever known."

Astor financed an overland expedition, following the route of Lewis and Clark, and a sea-going component to bring supplies and trade goods to offer the native tribes in exchange for furs. Ships loaded with fur pelts would travel to China where there was a profitable demand for them. Chinese goods would be procured and shipped to the east coast of America and Europe.

On paper, the plan was marked for success, but Peter Stark's new book reveals that the reality of the expedition was a startling contrast to the neatly proposed venture.

In 1810, the Overland Party, led by William Price Hunt, got off to a late start, putting them in peril of winter's hardships. Fear of being attacked by the legendary Blackfeet Indians sent them off the Lewis and Clark route into treacherous and unforgiving geography. There was an enormous miscalculation of food and water sources and starvation haunted them repeatedly.

It was a miracle that any of the travelers arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River in the winter of 1812, marking "only the second time in recorded history that a party of Americans had crossed the North American continent."

Astor's ship, the *Tonquin,* did not fare much better. Captained by a young U.S. naval hero of a belligerent and stubborn nature, the voyage was fraught with disagreements and drama. Bad weather and fear of being commandeered by a British ship (this was the War of 1812, after all) were of grave concern as well.

Of the 140 men that Astor sent to the mouth of the Columbia, more than 41 percent of them died. Astor, however, went on to accumulate incredible wealth in other business ventures – and planted his name on the community that grew up on the Oregon coast.

Stark's remarkable telling of this largely forgotten piece of history is thoroughly enlightening. He brings the characters and the landscape to life with vivid descriptions, coming at a pace that will keep readers turning pages to find out what comes next. The instances of perilous encounters are riveting.

Missoula author William Kittredge describes *Astoria* as "a hard-edged beauty." A sit-down with this book is time well spent – educational and very enjoyable.

The Montana author and journalist has written several books, including *The Last Empty Spaces: A Past and Present Journey Through the Blank Spots on the American Map*.

– Judy Shafter

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